

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03

SS-20 USIA-15 OMB-01 SAM-01 TRSE-00 EB-11 AID-20 IO-14

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R 281209Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2935

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 3580

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, IS

SUBJ: RABIN GOVERNMENT: SOME EARLY IMPRESSIONS

REF: TEL AVIV 2882

1. SUMMARY: CONSIDERING FORMIDABLE PROBLEMS FACING IT WHEN FORMED JUNE 3, RABIN GOVT HAS GOTTEN OFF TO RELATIVELY GOOD START. PUBLIC APPEARS TO BE DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE IN RABIN'S HANDLING OF FOREIGN AND SECURITY MATTERS, WHILE RESERVING JUDGEMENT ON DOMESTIC ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS. SHOULD RENEWED EFFORTS TO BROADEN COALITION BY BRINGING IN NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY FAIL, PROSPECTS FOR GOVT CONTINUING IN POWER WITH ONE-VOTE KNESSET MAJORITY, DESPITE CONCERTED OPPOSITION EFFORTS TO DEFEAT IT, SEEM IMPROVED AND REASONABLY ASSURED. END SUMMARY.

2. SURVIVAL OF RABIN GOVT APPEARS SOMEWHAT A MORE ASSURED TODAY THAN IT DID ON EVE OF ITS FORMATION SOME FOUR WEEKS AGO.

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AT THAT TIME DOUBTS EXISTED OVER LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF COALITION

GOVT WITH ONE-VOTE MAJORITY IN KNESSET, WHILE ABILITY OF RABIN TO FULFILL DEMANDING ROLE OF PRIME MINISTER AND HEAD OF RULING LABOR ALIGNMENT IN CRITICAL PERIOD OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY WAS MAJOR QUESTION MARK.

3. PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN RABIN HAS EMERGED STRONGEST IN FIELD OF SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS, BOLSTERED IN PART BY HIS PAST ACHIEVE-

MENTS AS IDF CHIEF OF STAFF AND ISRAELI AMBASSADOR TO US. VISIT OF PRESIDENT NIXON TO ISRAEL AND PLEDGES OF US SUPPORT AT THAT TIME PROVIDED RABIN GOVT WITH OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN UNDER AUSPICIOUS CONDITIONS. CERTAINLY RABIN'S HANDLING OF THE VISIT WAS WIDELY ACCLAIMED. PUBLIC CONFIDENCE, HOWEVER, WILL BE CLOSELY AFFECTED BY EXTENT TO WHICH US ASSURANCES ARE CONVERTED TO SPECIFIC AID COMMITMENTS AND HOW PUBLIC VIEWS RABIN AS AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE OF ISRAELI INTERESTS IN FACE OF GROWING US RELATIONS WITH ARABS. IN THIS REGARD, RABIN'S SPEECHES IN KNESSET AND ELSEWHERE HAVE SHOWN FIRMNESS, MODERATED BY REQUIREMENTS OF FLEXIBILITY IN CHANGING WORLD SCENE. THESE HAVE GENERALLY BEEN WELL-RECEIVED BY PUBLIC. HOWEVER, RABIN WILL BE UNDER CONSTANT ATTACK BY MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTIES WHICH INTERPRET FLEXIBILITY AS SIGNS OF SURRENDERING ISRAEL'S VITAL SECURITY INTERESTS. RABIN HAS THUS FAR EFFECTIVELY HANDLED PUBLIC APPREHENSIONS OVER US NUCLEAR ACCORD WITH EGYPT. HIS RESPONSE TO TERRORIST ATTACKS WILL BE NEXT SERIOUS CHALLENGE.

4. WITH DOMESTIC PROBLEMS SIDETRACKED OVER PAST WEEKS BY EXTERNAL ISSUES, PUBLIC HAS RESERVED ITS VIEW ON ABILITY OF RABIN GOVT TO HANDLE TOUGH DOMESTIC ISSUES. RABIN HAS COMMITTED HIS GOVT TO REDUCING SOCIAL GAP, REGARDED BY MANY AS MAJOR DOMESTIC PROBLEM, CURBING INFLATION AND EASING BALANCE OF PAYMENTS DEFICIT. IN DOMESTIC AREAS, RABIN NO DOUBT WILL RELY HEAVILY ON HIS ECONOMIC MINISTERS, WHO TO DATE HAVE SHOWED NO SIGNS OF URGENCY IN DEALING WITH COMPLEX SITUATION. WITH TRENDS INDICATING CONTINUED HIGH LEVEL OF INFLATION, RABIN WILL LIKELY FIND DOMESTIC ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS DEFYING QUICK OR PAINLESS SOLUTIONS. HOWEVER, SUCCESSFUL HANDLING OF FOREIGN AND SECURITY PROBLEMS COULD OVERSHADOW ANY EROSION OF PUBLIC SUPPORT STEMMING FROM DOMESTIC ISSUES.

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5. ONE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN STABILITY OF RABIN GOVT IS RABIN'S ABILITY TO UNIFY LABOR PARTY. FUTURE ROLES OF EBAN AND DAYAN ARE NOT CLEAR, BUT RABIN TOGETHER WITH PERES AND ALLON STAND GOOD CHANCE OF ASSERTING STRONG LEADERSHIP AND AVERTING DIVISIVE FACTIONAL CONFLICTS OR SPLITS. RABIN APPEARS RESPONSIVE TO DEMANDS FOR REFORMS IN CONDUCT OF PARTY ELECTIONS AND DECISION-MAKING, WHICH IN FINAL ANALYSIS SHOULD CONSOLIDATE HIS LEADERSHIP. MAJOR CARD IN HIS FAVOR IS DESIRE OF PARTY

MEMBERSHIP TO SEE HIM SUCCEED, REALIZING FAILURE COULD LEAD TO FURTHER LABOR ALIGNMENT ELECTORAL LOSSES.

6. MAJOR IMMEDIATE PROBLEM OF RABIN GOVT IS COPING WITH ONE-VOTE MAJORITY IN KNESSET, PARTICULARLY AS LIKUD AND ELEMENTS OF NRP SEEM BENT ON BRINGING DOWN RABIN GOVT--EITHER TO FORCE NEW ELECTIONS OR BRING ABOUT NATIONAL UNITY GOVT. THIS HAS IMPOSED BURDEN IN ASSURING THAT SUFFICIENT COALITION KNESSET MEMBERS ARE ON HAND WHEN VOTES ARE CALLED -- A NEED EMPHASIZED BY DEFEAT OF FIRST BILL INTRODUCED BY GOVT JUNE 10 ON EXTENSION OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE CONTROLS, WHEN OPPOSITION MANAGED TO CALL FOR VOTE WHEN MANY COALITION MKS WERE ABSENT. THIS BILL, AS WELL AS GOVT BUDGET, WAS LATER PASSED WHEN COALITION MOBILIZED SUFFICIENT MEMBERS TO ASSURE MAJORITY.

7. BARRING UNFORESEEN DEFECTIONS BY COALITION KNESSET MEMBERS, CURRENT CONSTELLATION OF OPPOSITION PARTIES ASSURES COALITION OF ADEQUATE VOTES TO PASS NECESSARY LEGISLATION. TO ASSURE MORE LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF HIS GOVT, RABIN IS KEEN TO EFFECT RETURN OF NRP TO ITS TRADITIONAL COALITION PARTNERSHIP WITH LABOR. IN PART, HE MAY ALSO BE MOTIVATED BY CONCERN THAT CONTINUING UNITED OPPOSITION OF NRP WITH LIKUD INCREASES STRENGTH OF EXTREMIST ELEMENTS IN NRP, WHICH MAY DRAW NRP AND LIKUD CLOSER AND THUS AT SOME STAGE POSE SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO LABOR'S HEGEMONY IN ISRAELI POLITICAL LIFE. RESUMED LABOR CONTACTS NOW REPORTEDLY UNDER WAY WITH NRP LEADERS HAVE GIVEN RISE TO SPECULATION THAT NRP MAY RETURN TO GOVT, WITH CERTAINTY THAT CITIZENS RIGHTS MOVEMENT WOULD THEN LEAVE. QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSIONS RATHER THAN SALE OF NUCLEAR REACTORS TO EGYPT MAY POSE MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM IN DETERMINING REALIGNMENT OF COALITION PARTNERSHIP AND ANY BROADENING, IF ONLY SLIGHTLY, OF COALITION MAJORITY IN KNESSET.

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8. ON BALANCE WE SEE PRESENT COALITION AS HAVING BETTER THAN 50/50 CHANCE OF CONTINUING IN POWER FOR SOMETIME, WITH A CHANCE OF NRP JOINING. WITH SOME LUCK AND ABILITY TO PROJECT IMAGE AS INNOVATIVE LEADER--PARTICULARLY IN RELATIONS WITH US--RABIN SHOULD BENEFIT OVER TIME FROM GROWING PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF HIM AS PM AND AS LEADER CAPABLE OF DEALING EFFECTIVELY WITH FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES (ALTHOUGH STAGE MANAGING IN ISRAEL OF NEXT STEPS IN ARAB-ISRAELI SETTLEMENT PROCESS COULD ENTAIL PITFALLS FOR ANY PM). PROSPECTS FOR NEW ELECTION IN NEAR FUTURE, THEREFORE, SEEM MORE REMOTE NOW THAN THEY DID FEW MONTHS AGO, IN PART BECAUSE PUBLIC MOOD INCREASINGLY IS INCLINED AGAINST NEW ELECTION AND LABOR ALIGNMENT LEADERSHIP SEE LITTLE ADVANTAGE TO BE GAINED.
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